



Vince Ryan
Harris County Attorney

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 27, 2011

**HARRIS COUNTY FILES SUIT SEEKING PENALTIES FOR DIOXIN
CONTAMINATION OF THE SAN JACINTO RIVER**

HOUSTON, Harris County Attorney- Today Vince Ryan announced that his office filed suit against several companies for allowing dioxin to pollute the San Jacinto River for a period of over 45 years. The Defendants in this suit are International Paper Company, Waste Management, Inc., Waste Management of Texas, Inc. and McGinnis Industrial Maintenance Corporation.

The County's lawsuit contends that in 1965 a Waste Management company disposed of highly toxic waste from International Paper's nearby paper mill into waste pits located on the shores of the San Jacinto River. The toxic contents of these pits leaked into the River for decades. The companies eventually abandoned the waste pits, and over the years portions of them became submerged below the San Jacinto River.

Because of the health risks caused by the dioxin, the State of Texas has issued a consumption advisory for crab and all species of fish from the San Jacinto River, warning women who are nursing, pregnant or who might be pregnant and children under the age of 12 not to consume any fish or blue crab from the area. It has also advised adults and children to avoid the risk of exposure to dioxin through skin by not camping, fishing, or picnicking near the San Jacinto River where the toxic waste ponds were located. According to the County human and ecological health continue to be threatened by releases of dioxin.

"When I took office, I asked community residents and leaders to name one thing I could do to improve the environment in Harris County. Cleaning up the San Jacinto River Waste Pits was, without a doubt, the thing almost everyone agreed upon" said Vince Ryan.

In 2008, at the urging of the Harris County Attorney, Commissioners Court and others, the San Jacinto River Site was added by the EPA to the Superfund National Priorities List for clean up and the EPA is currently working to determine how to remediate the dioxin contamination. Texas law permits the County to file suit seeking penalties of up to \$25,000 per day for each and every day the pollution occurred. It also provides for injunctive relief and can be used to require the companies to fund environmental projects that will assist the citizens of Harris County to learn about and respond to the dioxin in the river as well as address environmental damage not covered by the EPA action.

Harris County is represented by Vice Ryan, Harris County Attorney, Terry O'Rourke, and Rock Owens of the Office of the Harris County Attorney, and the Houston law firm of Connelly, Baker and Wotring LLP.

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